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ABSTRACT

The dimensions of the advisory role and its relationship to teachers are discussed in relation to work carried out in the Open Education project at the University of Illinois. Project activities during the 1970-71 year are presented. Variables in the role of the advisor which emerged are as follows: (1) locus of control; (2) the function of time, (3) the development of trust or credibility; (4) the intrusion of local constraints; (5) the function of expectations; (6) the skills and resources needed for the function of the advisor; (7) professional/personal needs; (8) building autonomy; and (9) the "layering" of teachers. (DB)

# IN-CLASS TEACHER TRAINING FOR OPEN EDUCATION*

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This report is based upon the work we are doing in our project in Open Education at the University of Illinois that has been supported by the U. S. Office of Education under the Education Professions Development Act. The project was established in order to provide training for a future leadership group in education and who would be enrolled as doctoral fellows at the University. In addition, the project provides supportive services and teacher training to a group of teachers in many parts of the State of Illinois who wish to move towards Open Education. The doctoral fellows, along with additional staff, provide the teacher training and services in our project, primarily on-site.

The project grew out of two prior thrusts. We had previously had funded a program to develop teacher trainers in early childhood education under EPDA. This, however, was conceived as a generalists program, without any particular educational orientation as its base. We had also been working in the Washington Elementary School in Champaign helping teachers move toward more open classrooms. (The Washington Elementary School is a laboratory school jointly supported by the Champaign Public Schools and the University of Illinois College of Education). It was our hope to integrate and extend the work of these two projects.

During 1970-71, the co-directors of the project visited schools in Illinois inviting individual schools to join with us in the project. This invitation was offered both to administrations and to individual teachers. Our hope was to work with clusters of teachers within schools on a voluntary basis. Teachers as well as schools would have the possibility of selecting alternatives, either what we were doing or whatever else has been available. While we wanted the teachers in the schools to know what we were about, we tried not to impose a particular model of instruction on them. We visited all the schools and had teachers visit our work at Washington School so that a basis for judgment would be available for the teachers to decide whether or not to work with us. Once school sites were established an advisory committee of administrators, teachers and parents from each site was established. This committee was involved in the process of selecting our fellows.



In September 1971 our sites included

a) A kindergarten center in a rural area of the state in which a team of four teachers had been implementing an academically oriented semi-formal program for children.

b) A magnet "laboratory" school in a middle-sized city in the center of the state that attracted an interracial student clientele. This school was involved in trying out a whole series of educational innovations with varying degrees of success.

c) A newly built and newly integrated school in a city about 40 miles northwest of Chicago which had employed five beginning teachers from

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the University of Illinois who had been in a program which included a semester of study in Bristol, England, and practice in an infant school there. Hence, these students, while young and inexperienced, had a firm foundation in open education.

d) A suburban school which was in its third year of developing towards open education. Three teachers had already worked for at least a year on restructuring their classrooms and in which the principal has had a commitment to open education.

e) Another suburban school system in which teams of teachers had been working in nongraded classrooms. Teams at the primary level in two of these schools had volunteered to work with us while retaining their team structures.

The variations in situations, goals, and styles becomes obvious as one hears the attributes of the schools. Their commonality was a verbalized interest in open education and a willingness to become involved in the project and accept help from an outsider.

Initially staff members and fellows were assigned to particular schools, with an attempt made to match the competencies of our staff and fellows to the needs of the schools and teachers. (It should be recognized, however, that our group was new at this type of thing and all involved realized that this would be a learning experience for all as it has.) Members of our group spent one to two days per week in each school working with the teachers. observing classrooms, conferencing on the results of these observations, recommending changes in organization and teaching practices and being as helpful as possible while avoiding any threat to the teacher. In some instances our work with teachers seemed to have minimal relationship to open education. What we did was in response to the needs of teachers, sometimes providing help, sometimes building a readiness to accept help. In most instances we tried to keep our help both concrete and practical.

As the year progressed we became aware of the limitations of the scope of activities we had determined would be the focus of our role, prior to our entry into the school. The in-class activities needed to be supplemented with a variety of out-of-class activities. A number of workshops were offered to school staffs focusing on various curriculum topics, such as science, mathematics or reading. Each workshop was designed to involve teachers in activities which were parallel to those we hoped they would implement in their classrooms with children. The workshops were generally held for a staff on one particular school at a time. Many of the workshops have been repeated for other school faculties at other sites.

Two additional strategies for change had also evolved in our program: A series of weekend retreats for 30 teachers, each drawn from all of the sites, and a semester long curriculum workshop offered for graduate credit through our extension division. The retreat provided opportunities for teachers to get together and share concerns, ideas, and experiences with their colleagues from other areas. The comfort of the site we had used and the many contacts for informal social interactions seem to be helping to build an esprit in the group. At the same time, each retreat is designed with a curriculum focus so that teachers can explore and try out new ideas and new skills, participating in activities in which they as much as their children are the focus of attention and yet in which a degree of safety is provided in the isolation of the retreat site from the schools in which they teach.

The semester long curriculum workshop is another extension of our in-class work. A number of teachers, we felt, were ready to reflect on what they were doing. The workshop could provide help for this reflection and for the testing of ideas with colleagues. The teacher on-going classroom practice is the basis for the work in the workshop even though the workshop is held outside of school hours. While both these activities have moved us outside the classroom with teachers, our work in these activities is rooted in the teachers' classrooms and our advisory service in these classrooms. These represent an extension of our in-class role rather than a substitution.

As we analyzed our work with teachers this year, we became aware of the issues and concerns embedded in the process of teacher change. The relationship between external advisor, as the in-class teacher trainer is beginning to be called, and the teacher was crucial in effecting change. We attempted to identify threads of concerns that we feel are worthy of further study and within which specific hypotheses for testing can be generated.

## The Relationship Between Advisor and Teacher

The role of the in-class teacher trainer seems to be central to the process of extending Open Education, with advisors or consultants serving in this capacity. It seemed that it would be profitable to use our experience in our EPDA project to study this role as a way of generating problems and hypotheses worthy of the use of more formal research techniques. Our strategies for study included informal observation and analysis of our own staff and fellows in action as well as reflection upon the problems and issues that were highlighted in our weekly staff meetings and regular conferences.

The difficulty we found in drawing any conclusions about the role of the advisor and his relationship with the classroom teacher was that the role seemed to be a constantly shifting and changing one. The one thing that seemed to regularly characterize it was its characteristic irregularity. A number of variables in this role, however, seemed to emerge, partly from these irregularities. These included:

1. Locus of control - The advisor is always using his role and the way in which he works with teachers as a way of communicating the characteristics of Open Education and the ways that teachers might work with children. Since noncoerciveness is one characteristic of Open Education, the advisor was forced to act in a noncoercive manner. This placed the control over the relationship between advisor and teacher in the hands of the teacher. The advisor, on the other hand, finds that what he does is a response to the needs or demands of the teacher. Often the advisor feels he is not really in control of the situation. Only as a relationship continues does the advisor function in a more autonomous role, with a greater degree of parity.

2. The function of time - As the relationship between advisor and advisee continues, changes occur in that relationship and in the function of the advisor. Role attributes that are most important in the beginning of an advisor-advisee relationship may be less important later, while acts that would have earlier been considered inappropriate may even be seen as crucial later. The function of the advisor needs to be viewed along a time dimension. In our own project, for example, the time spent by the advisors in the teacher's classroom seemed crucial at the beginning. As the year progressed, not only did it seem appropriate to spend less time with the teacher in her class, but often activities

that took place outside the classroom seemed to become more important, and often more appropriate.

In addition, the amount of time between classroom visits seemed an important factor. This time allowed the teacher to reflect, to react to the content of her sessions with the advisor and to act on suggestions and ideas. What the optimum time between classroom visits is, we do not know. Our visits occurred weekly. This was a greater span of time between visits than had occurred in our Washington School project last year where an advisor was almost constantly available and a lesser span of time than in other situations in which we have been involved where visits have occurred monthly. This span of time seemed to be appropriate for what we were doing.

3. The development of trust or credibility - The basis for any helping relationship is the degree of trust felt between the client and the helper. For the advisor, the trust aspect of the relationship seemed less to be a function of a feeling of safety on the part of the teacher, and more to be a function of the degree of credibility that the advisor had. The advisor had to establish himself as one who could be helpful, who had something of practical worth to offer the teacher. Whether this need to test the advisor was a function of the fact that the advisor was related to a university rather than a school agency is beyond our ability to know. (Universities are not the most credible educational agencies when it comes to the performance of service.) However, the establishment of credibility did seem to be an individual matter.

4. The intrusion of local constraints - In each project setting we found that the role of the advisor was determined not only by the individuals in the teacher-advisory relationship, but also by various constraints within the local situation. A teachers' strike and the residue of conflict that resulted from the response of the local board of education severely limited what could be done by an advisor in one setting, as well as how much effort the not-too-willing teachers would put out for any education function.

In another situation the relationship between the teachers and the building principal seriously influenced the role that the advisor played in these buildings even though there were no formal ties between the advisor and the school administration.

5. The function of expectations - Another set of variables that seems to control the relationship between teacher and advisor are the expectations held by both parties. The teacher, in entering the relationship, has already anticipated what will be, as has the advisor. Each set of expectations help to determine what will be viewed as appropriate or inappropriate. The need to extend the expectations of both parties becomes evident.

The above variables suggest that the attributes of any advisory relationship is a function of variables without as well as within the advisor. Within the advisor the following variables seem also to be significant and worthy of future study.

6. The skills and resources needed for the function of the advisor - Advisors, as suggested above, need to be viewed as competent in order to build credibility; they also need competence in order to function. But what are the dimensions of competency that are essential? Is there a body of knowledge or a set of skills that each person must have in order to be effective in this capacity.

Often the literature of education has constructed a dichotomy between a core of process skills that supervisors or teachers might have. This has been separated out from the body of substantive knowledge that is deemed necessary from each situation. The process/content dichotomy is also related to the generalist/specialist distinction that is often made. Should advisors limit themselves to particular areas or age levels or can they be equally effective everywhere?

While none of our advisors were competent in every area of the curriculum in which they had to deal, or at every grade level, each did have an area of specialization in which their substantive knowledge was greater than in others. Beyond that, however, they had to use what might be called process skills to move people along. Perhaps their performance in one area of the program allowed their credibility to be carried over to other areas? Perhaps the dichotomy is not that strict after all?

7. Professional/personal needs - A number of different causes seem to motivate persons to join the education profession and a number of different personal needs seem to be met by those who move up the competency ladder within the profession. Whether a teacher decides to work with children because of an internal drive to provide help for others, or whether that teacher must feel a degree of control over other persons lives, is beyond the scope of this paper, but the advisor seems to be successful because he uses himself in an extending relationship with another human being. These personal dimensions of the advisor's role are in need of study, for how an advisor operates seems to be a function of the kinds of satisfactions received from the role. Where satisfactions were less direct, conflict or frustration was often created.

Our advisors all had a background of successful teaching. Often the need to work at influencing another person to provide a particular educational service for children which was obvious to them and could be provided directly without much difficulty caused frustration for the advisor.

8. Building autonomy - While teachers controlled the relationship with the advisors, the advisors were able to influence this relationship over time. One of the needs, we felt, was to help teachers function with a higher degree of autonomy. Over time the advisor should be needed less and less. To some extent the advisors personal satisfactions, however, were a function of being needed by the teacher. To what extent our advisors will be able to wean themselves from the teachers cannot be assessed at present. If the relationship develops successfully, the advisor should be viewed as one more of the many resources available to her in providing the best educational opportunities for the children in her class. Whether this status will diminish personal satisfactions for the advisor or not, is probably as much a function of the advisor's degree of personal maturity as anything else.

9. The "layering" of teachers - As we have worked with teachers during the past few years in the process of teacher change, we have found that just as the change process is a complex phenomenon, so the teacher as well is a complex phenomenon. Teachers who have volunteered to work with us accept change, yet the process of change moves along in fits and starts. At certain periods the process of change moves smoothly as teachers are willing to modify structures and practices. At other times it seems as if a great deal of resistance to change is building up in the teacher even when the change has been verbally accepted. Nor could each teacher change in the same way or at the same rate.

Our original idea of a plateau affect to explain the process of teacher change has begun to change towards what we are calling the "onion construct." Teachers may be viewed as being made up of various levels. The external levels might include accepted room arrangements, specific selected texts, classroom materials, etc. Closer to the core come specific instructional strategies. Further in come goals for teachers. Within the core of the teacher are a set of professional beliefs and values, beliefs about the nature of childhood, the nature of education or schooling, the role of the teacher, and so on. Further still internally are a set of personal beliefs and values which we feel are outside our domain to deal with and modify. This "onion construct" is consistent with the view of values presented by Wlodarczyk and the map of classroom culture hypothesized by Hirabayashi, both members of our group.

It seems to us that the degree of ease or difficulty associated with the process of change of a particular characteristic of a teacher's method is a function of the distance of that characteristic from the internal professional core of the teacher. Characteristics in the external layers of the teacher are more responsive to external stimuli or pressures, hence they are easier to change. (For example, teachers seldom resist reorganizing the physical structure of the classroom or creating activity centers.) As we move to deeper layers, greater resistance to change is felt. (It is harder to effect the reading program than the science program.) And characteristics closest to the internal layers of beliefs are even more resistant to change. (It is difficult for many teachers to so share real decision-making power with their children.) Understanding the depth of layering of a particular practice might help the advisor to develop more effective strategies for change as well as help him accept resistance and difficulties related to certain kinds of change.

These then are the dimensions of the advisory role and its relationship to teachers that we have identified as worthy of study. The strategies for studying them should probably rely heavily on ethnographic techniques. The interrelatedness of these dimensions, which should be evident to the listener requires that they be observed in a natural setting with a minimum of intrusion from the researcher.